

USDA Observes the 2007 National Disability Employment Awareness Month

USDA's 2007 National Disability Employment Awareness Month ceremony was held on October 3, 2007. Acting Secretary Chuck Conner greeted the audience in USDA's Jefferson Auditorium.

In his address, Acting Secretary Conner noted that this year's theme, "Workers with Disabilities: Talent for a Winning Team", complements the USDA Strategic Management Plan to develop a diverse workforce with the necessary skills to accomplish USDA's mission. He stated that "Creating a great team of employees means hiring a wide range of talents. Diversity isn't a goal for the sake of diversity. It is central to the success of our organization. We need a variety of skills and perspectives to move our goals forward. That's why USDA is dedicated to breaking down barriers and furthering employment opportunities for people with disabilities."

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Annabelle Romero, opened the ceremony. She was proud to boast about USDA's participation in the Work Force Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities (commonly known as "WRP") as an area where USDA continually stands out and receives Federal recognition from the Secretaries of the Departments of Labor and Defense, who co-chair the WRP. Deputy Assistant Secretary Romero acknowledged a former WRP Summer Intern, Susan Wensky, who is now a permanent employee in the Foreign Agricultural Service's International Trade Policy office as an Agricultural Marketing Specialist. Ms. Wensky is one example of USDA's results in hiring through the WRP. This past summer six USDA agencies tapped into the WRP talent pool and hired 27 students on various appointments from 24 colleges and universities across the nation. Students were hired in occupational fields such as: Information Technology, Mathematics, Chemistry, Civil Engineering; Archaeology, Social Science, Fisheries, Range Management; Physical Science, Forestry Technicians, Hydrology; Outdoor Recreational, Wildlife Biologist, Geology, Animal Science; Natural Resources; International Affairs/Studies, Political Science, Writers; Accounting, Economics, Contracting, and Law Enforcement.

The keynote speaker at this year's ceremony was Stuart J. Ishimaru, Commissioner, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Commissioner Ishimaru's speech focused on the trend for employment of persons with severe disabilities in the Federal Government.

Carl-Martin Ruiz, Director of USDA's Office of Outreach and Diversity, provided closing remarks. He reaffirmed USDA's commitment to civil rights and diversity and hiring of persons with disabilities.

This month USDA is holding four workshops that are open to all employees. The workshops are designed to provide helpful information about recruiting and working with employees with disabilities.